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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 001295

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E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: FOUR MONTHS OUT, CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY CORREA'S TO
LOSE

REF: A. GUAYAQUIL 274
[1](#)B. QUITO 1264
[1](#)C. QUITO 1182
[1](#)D. QUITO 1039

Classified By: PolOff Erik Martini for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Early polls confirm a clear plurality and broad support for President Correa's Alianza PAIS movement over any other party, but a recent dip in President Correa's approval rating could signal some softness. Minister of Energy Alberto Acosta is rumored to be ready to leave office to run at the head of the Alianza PAIS ticket. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal has still failed to define the method by which seats will be apportioned. A "winner take all" method apportioning seats to the top vote getters would favor Alianza PAIS if elections were held today. The Assembly process is turning out to be expensive and increasingly complex as candidates jockey for positions and movements and parties flirt with alliances. End Summary.

Alianza PAIS Leading in Polls

[1](#)2. (C) Polling information obtained by the Embassy points to an early Alianza PAIS advantage in every province. Major polling firm Informe Confidencial tested hundreds of questions in the eight largest provinces by population on May [1](#)5. When people were asked "for which party would you vote?", Alianza PAIS scored highest in every province, with a low of 28.2% support in Azuay province to a high of 45.5% in Tungurahua. The only other movement or party to score in the double digits was the Social Christian Party (PSC) with 11.1% in its traditional stronghold of Guayas province. Alianza PAIS registered a surprisingly strong 45.2% level of support in Guayas province, reflecting inroads Correa has made into the stronghold of right of center coastal-based parties like PSC and PRIAN (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) When asked whether they would vote for a candidate supported by President Rafael Correa, respondents said yes by margins ranging from a high of 80.6% in El Oro province to a low of 58.5% in Manabi province. Seventy-three percent of Guayas respondents and 72% of Pichincha province (where Quito is located) respondents said they would vote for candidates supported by Correa. A large majority (85.9%) of Guayas respondents qualified Rafael Correa's presidential performance as "good".

[1](#)4. (C) Despite Alianza PAIS's early lead in the polls, however, there are already indications of softening public

support for the president and his political movement. A new poll conducted on May 30 by respected polling firm CEDATOS/Gallup shows President Correa's approval rating has slipped to 67% from the 76% it registered in late April. The poll indicates that Ecuadorians are split over the President's strong criticism of the press (Ref B), and that a recent corruption scandal involving Economy Minister Patino (Ref C) has also generated doubts.

"Proportional" Method Still Not Defined

15. (C) Minister of Government Gustavo Larrea's preference for a "winner take all" method of assigning Assembly seats (Ref D) would clearly favor Alianza PAIS at this stage in the process. However, the TSE has not yet promulgated required regulations defining how to implement proportionality. It claims to be studying five different proposals. Constitutional scholar Simon Pachano points out in his Assembly blog that if the 130 Assembly seats were simply assigned to top provincial and national vote getters, it would in effect lead to a winner take all result, as in the elections for the 1997 Assembly, where one party won 90% of the seats in Guayas province with only 36.2% of the vote. Similar lopsided results were obtained in Pichincha and Esmeraldas provinces.

16. (C) Recent elections have tried to generate more representative proportionality through the use of a mathematical formula. For example, in the last election for Bolivar province's three congressional deputies, voters who marked Lucio Gutierrez's Patriotic Society Party (PSP) "list" (i.e. marked every candidate on the slate) far outnumbered any others voting either for a list or for individual candidates. Under Gustavo Larrea's scheme, all three of Bolivar's seats would have gone to PSP. However, under the proportional formula that was actually applied, the PSP won only two of three seats in Bolivar, with Pachakutik taking the third.

Assembly Turning Out to Be Expensive and Complex

17. (U) Assembly elections will cost Ecuadorian taxpayers \$42 million to administer, almost three times the cost of the popular referendum and more than the combined cost of two rounds of national elections in 2006. This figure does not include the public funding of campaign publicity, which will add many more millions to the total bill as candidates and political movements proliferate to try their luck at the polls. With another round of voting to approve a new constitution projected in 2008 and the expenses of the Assembly, the price tag for Correa's democratic reform exercise could easily end up over \$100 million.

18. (U) In addition to the expense, the Assembly vote is made unwieldy by the number of candidates to select from. TSE President Acosta showed off prototype ballots on sheets several feet long, with hundreds of candidates to choose from. Voters may no longer tick one box for all the candidates of a party, but must mark each individual candidate. The TSE has reportedly already registered 11 political parties, 70 national movements and 58 provincial movements that will present lists of candidates, and the registration period has yet to close. The TSE has said it will conduct its own quick count. In the past, it has contracted outside firms, which resulted in disastrous failures in the 2006 election. Voting abroad in consulates and embassies for the six Assembly members allotted to migrants will also burden Ecuador's Foreign Ministry; almost 10,000 Ecuadorians registered to vote in the month of May, adding to the 143,057 already on the voting lists. More Ecuadorians appear to be registering in Europe than Latin America or the U.S. and Canada.

Election Chronogram

19. (U) The TSE appears to have finally settled on a final timeline. The timeline leaves room between each event for challenges and appeals.

-- 18 June -- Deadline for signature collections and registration of candidates
-- 13 August -- Campaign begins
-- 10 September -- Last day to publish poll/survey information
-- 26 September -- Campaign and campaign publicity ends
-- 30 September -- Assembly elections
-- 11 October -- Results published
-- 31 October -- Assembly installed

Candidates and Alliances

¶10. (C) Parties and personalities continue to test the waters for the Assembly. Ricardo Patino has publicly said he would be open to be a candidate for Movimiento PAIS, but Correa administration sources tell us that only Minister of Energy Alberto Acosta is confirmed to run at this point. Rafael Correa's sister, Pierina, told PolChief on May 23 that she would run in accord with her younger brother for the Assembly at the head of her own movement, the Movement of Citizen Integration (MIC), but affiliated with the Alianza PAIS slate. She blamed subordinates for the "misunderstanding" with her brother over her new movement (Ref C). Pierina claimed Rafael is pushing for like-minded movements to come under the Alianza PAIS umbrella, rather than running separately on their own lists. Both left and right-of-center parties are having trouble forging alliances in the runup to Assembly elections; no major alliance has been declared yet, but sources have told Embassy and ConGen Guayaquil officers that alliances may materialize in some provinces, and later in the Assembly itself. Few parties, however, have their lists of candidates ready 15 days from the deadline.

Comment

¶11. (C) Correa could go nowhere but down after the popular referendum setting up Assembly elections passed with 81% support. It now appears that his public support has softened to around 67%. Alianza PAIS is still significantly ahead of all others in early polling and remains likely to achieve a controlling majority of seats - although the discipline and cohesion of his motley coalition may be tested over the months of the Assembly itself. The Assembly's inherent complexity, expense and incessant campaigning, coupled with unrealistic expectations, will tax the voters, and four months is a lifetime in Ecuadorian politics.

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